

The University of Oldenburg’s strategy for the promotion and qualification of postdoctoral researchers

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I. Purpose

The purpose of this strategy paper is to establish a basis for the comprehensive support of junior postdoctoral researchers – from recruitment to career development – both within and outside the world of academia. It focuses in particular on strategic university-wide priorities such as gender equality and diversity.

The university’s overarching goal is to attract highly qualified academics for research, teaching and research transfer by creating excellent conditions for the professional and personal development of its academic staff.

The following considerations of the Presidential Board are intended to inspire all relevant organisational units and the Schools to develop structural or operational measures within their own areas, which can then be integrated into a university-wide concept. In doing so, the University of Oldenburg is also acting in accordance with the German Research Foundation’s (DFG) “Principles of Effective Career Support in

Academia" (2021) – to adopt defined principles for dealing with early-career researchers and to act accordingly.

II. Baseline situation

In recent years, the Presidential Board has adopted two strategic papers on the promotion of early-career researchers. Published in 2017, the "Oldenburg Model of Competences" focuses on sharing development responsibility between supervisors and early-career researchers themselves. It has been designed to help early-career researchers achieve their career objectives in the world of academia and beyond by developing a comprehensive range of competences, including by taking development responsibility into their own hands. In 2018, a structural framework was developed for this concept in the form of the position paper entitled "Framework conditions of the University of Oldenburg for early-career researchers". In collaboration with the university management and the Schools, standards for the design of the framework conditions were formulated for all career levels, to establish comparable, quality-assured measures to promote early-career researchers in line with the university's commitments.

By early-career researchers, the university refers to doctoral candidates and postdocs who qualify or continue to qualify academically within the scope of various formal structures such as grants, third-party funds, budgets or with external funding. Early-career researchers are subject to consecutive qualification stages based on their degree of academic independence and research performance. In describing these stages, the university is guided by the EU model prescribing the following career levels¹:

R1 First Stage Researcher: up to the point of PhD

R2 Recognised Researcher: PhD holders or equivalent who are not yet fully independent

R3 Established Researcher: researchers who have developed a level of independence

R4 Leading Researcher: researchers leading their research area or field

It is important to note that these stages do not have to correspond one-to-one with individual career paths and furthermore, this will often not be the case in the German system, with its different types of positions (for example, for the "habilitation" postdoctoral lecturing qualification). In addition, although the stages build on each other in the sense of academic career progression, they need not, and indeed are by no means always followed strictly in the order R1 to R4. Nevertheless, the EU stage model is also a useful tool in the German situation for making the careers of early-career researchers representable and comparable across national borders.

In the last few years, the structures and the support and qualification opportunities for the R1 career phase have been consolidated at the University of Oldenburg and, in some cases, even expanded. An essential precondition for needs-based development were the introduction of the doctoral student registration system and the doctoral student service system, which is currently under development. These tools provide reliable statistical data about the group and also facilitate a targeted approach.

Such registration facilities and data are currently not yet available for postdoctoral researchers. Nevertheless, the following section will outline the support structures and measures that have been implemented to date, as well as their planned further development.

For the further development of the framework conditions for postdoctoral researchers, in addition to the strategic papers on the personnel development of academic staff ("Oldenburg Model of Competences" (2017) and the "Framework conditions of the University of Oldenburg for early-career researchers" (2019)), the findings of the National Report on Junior Scholars (BuWiN, last published in 2021) and the DFG's "Principles of Effective Career Support in Academia" (2021) will also be taken into account;

¹ See "Towards a European Framework for Researcher Careers", European Commission (2011).

the UOL has already been implementing the majority of these for some time. In addition, the “Principles for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice at the University of Oldenburg” are currently being revised in accordance with the DFG’s “Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice” (2019).

III. Postdoctoral researchers – qualification stages

The following career phases for postdoctoral researchers have been identified in accordance with the European Qualifications Framework:

R2: Recognised Researchers

Up to two years after a doctorate

Further academic qualification (for careers within and outside the university)

R3: Established Researchers

Up to six years after a doctorate

Postdoctoral researchers in qualification posts

Postdoctoral researchers in third-party funded posts

Postdoctoral candidates seeking a Habilitation (including scholarship holders who are connected to the University of Oldenburg)

Senior lecturers with fixed-term contracts

Junior research group leaders

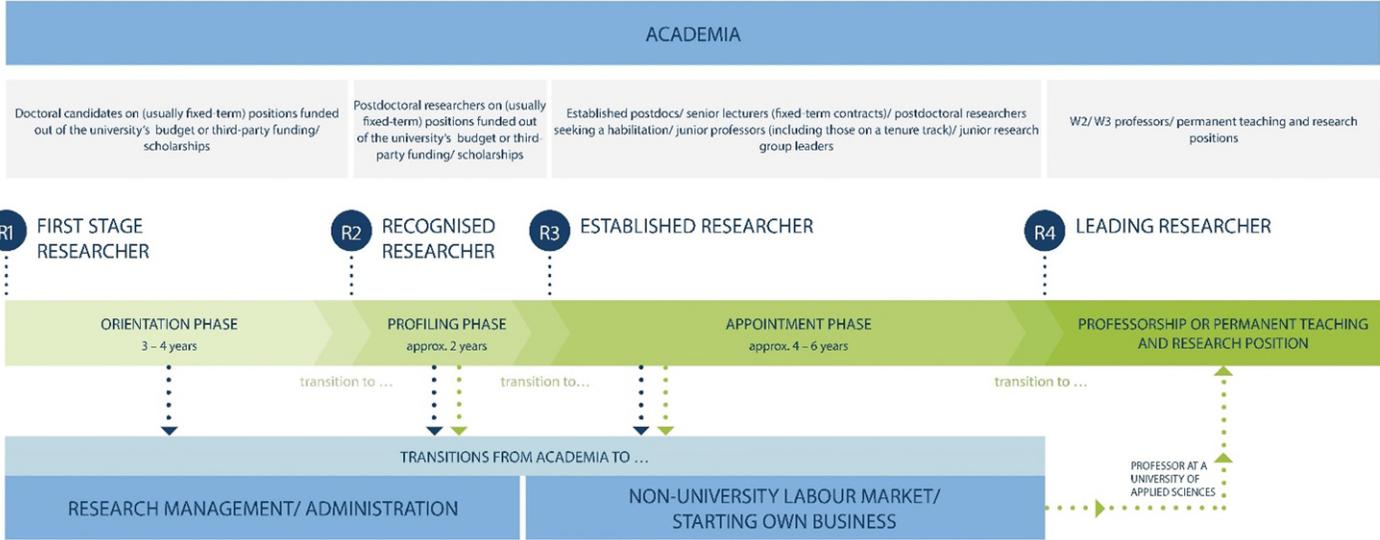
Junior professors (including those on a tenure track)

The above-mentioned groups could be further classified or expanded based on additional criteria such as age, academic age, temporary/fixed-term contracts, type of funding (scholarships), status (visiting researchers), type of employment (research, teaching), place of employment (universities, non-university research institutions, businesses), etc.

IV. Career paths for junior postdoctoral researchers

Generally speaking, researchers with a doctorate can pursue careers both in academia and in the non-university labour market. Research management or research administration is still a relatively new field at the interface between the two markets. The field has undergone tremendous development in recent years, and specific career profiles have emerged (e.g., in research funding, research transfer and the promotion of early-career researchers). In the non-academic sector, management positions in businesses, public administration bodies and cultural institutions, but also scientific roles in research and development departments both in Germany and abroad, are attractive career options, as is setting up one’s own business as a self-employed person.

CAREER PATHS FOR ACADEMICS



Researchers can also switch between the sectors at different stages in their career – usually just before or just after reaching the next qualification level (e.g. immediately after obtaining their doctorate or before starting the second postdoc phase). If researchers decide to switch sectors, they must be well prepared and make the decision on their own. For this to succeed, the individual support provided by responsible managers and supervisors dovetails with the operational measures offered by the university in various central and decentralised organisational units. (See appendix)

V. Perspectives

The University of Oldenburg's personnel development concept for academia, "The Oldenburg Model of Competences. Personnel development with responsibility for early-career researchers", which was adopted in 2017, pursues four main goals:

- Recruitment transparency
- Career transition guidance
- Enabling different career paths
- Fostering a culture of responsible leadership

Going forward, measures that have already been introduced to achieve these goals will continue to be implemented and further developed. All those involved – from supervisors and superiors to the university management – will continue to be responsible for advising and supporting the next generations of researchers in making their own decisions about their career paths within or outside academia.

As previously mentioned, gender equality and diversity are university-wide priorities, which are strategically taken into account in all areas. The University of Oldenburg will continue to pursue and further develop measures to achieve gender equality and to increase the proportion of doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers from abroad, who have non-traditional educational backgrounds or disabilities or chronic illnesses.

a) Attracting early-career researchers

1. In order to attract the best postdoctoral researchers, the positions should ideally be advertised publicly.
2. As far as the career path of junior postdoctoral researchers is concerned, it is desirable to support their transfer to other universities.
3. In the transition from R3 to R4, particular attention must be paid to equality and active recruiting.
4. Active recruiting is a particularly effective approach from career level R3 onwards.

b) Career guidance and development

Feedback sessions on past performance and realistic perspectives are particularly valuable tools for career planning, especially during transitions between career phases. Supervisors and superiors should also be given support in their role as leaders so that they can fulfil the tasks for which they are responsible. (See also the DFG's "Principles of Effective Career Support in Academia", No. 4.)

In addition to personal guidance, career orientation and career planning services will continue to play an important role in both the academic and non-academic sectors. Key building blocks include individual workshops, peer coaching programmes and the mentoring programmes "Potentials. Career orientation and planning for female researchers" (for female doctoral candidates in the qualifying phase and junior postdoctoral researchers) and "Progressio! Successful development in academic leadership" (for female

researchers who have already opted for the professorship career path or a leadership position in academia)² offered by the Graduate Academy (in both German and English), as well as the mentoring and coaching programmes offered as part of the sub-project “Career paths” of the BMBF-funded model project “Innovative Hochschule Jade-Oldenburg! (IHJO!)”, which primarily support the transition to the non-university sector. The unique IHJO! activities offer doctoral students in particular, but also academics who have recently obtained their doctorate, the opportunity to get in touch with representatives of the regional business community, public administration bodies and cultural institutions at an early stage and to gain initial practical experience in everyday professional life. The University of Oldenburg offers researchers and doctoral candidates a unique opportunity to explore career paths both within and outside academia.

For specific career paths towards professorships or leadership positions in the academic sector, the research funding advisory services offered by the Department for Research and Transfer are indispensable. This includes personal advice on obtaining third-party funding from regional, national and European funding bodies. In addition, researchers can submit applications for start-up funding for junior research groups and for funding to secure one’s own position, which primarily serve to promote academic independence, from the Presidential Board’s research programme budget.

In order to familiarise postdoctoral researchers as early as possible with all aspects of career development and with the internal and external support available, it might be worth considering setting up a “forum for postdoctoral researchers” to serve as a central point of contact that targets early-career researchers immediately after obtaining their doctorate and combines general information, individual coaching activities and qualification and networking opportunities.

The continuation or expansion of the current mentoring programmes to include opportunities for other target groups might also be worthwhile, following a corresponding evaluation.

c) Enabling different career paths

Researchers with a doctorate are qualified for career paths in a variety of fields. For this reason, it is important to raise researchers’ awareness at an early stage of alternative career options in other sectors that are equivalent to those in academia. (See also the DFG’s “Principles of Effective Career Support in Academia”, Nos. 9 and 10.) For this reason, the Graduate Academy offers a wide range of opportunities for researchers to develop their own competence profile (personal skills, management skills, social skills) so that they can increase their chances of success in the non-academic job market. The joint project IHJO!, in which the University of Oldenburg, Jade University of Applied Sciences and OFFIS participate, organises special projects, programmes and events so that doctoral candidates and newly qualified and more established postdoctoral researchers can meet representatives from businesses, cultural institutions and public administration bodies in the region. By facilitating this mutual exchange, it is able to directly pursue its mission of increasing the innovative strength of the region by means of “transfer via minds”.

In certain disciplines, a professorship at a university of applied sciences may also be a viable career choice. In collaboration with our partner Jade University of Applied Sciences, we will regularly provide information about this career path at joint events.

d) Fostering a culture of responsible leadership

The topic of leadership is not a priority in academic education. However, postdoctoral researchers often have to take on leadership and supervisory tasks and are themselves managed by superiors. In order for

² To reflect our aspirations regarding diversity, both programmes also explicitly address inter-, trans- and non-binary persons who identify as female. Female researchers with disabilities or chronic illnesses are also explicitly invited to apply. In the “Potentials” programme, preference will also be given to women who were the first in their family to complete a university degree.

both status groups (early-career researchers and their supervising professors) to be able to fulfil their respective leadership responsibilities, they are offered training and coaching opportunities tailored to their needs. The programme offered by the Graduate Academy is aimed at postdoctoral researchers in the profiling and appointment phases, while the “Academic Leadership” programme offered by the Professional Development department is aimed at newly appointed professors, tenure-track professors and tenured professors. As such, the University of Oldenburg has already implemented yet another key recommendation of the DFG (No. 5).

Leaders at all levels are responsible for empowering young researchers in every career phase to act independently and make their own decisions by providing regular, open feedback.

e) Internationalisation

We do not currently have exact figures on the level of internationalisation among postdoctoral researchers at the University of Oldenburg due to the lack of data collection possibilities. In order to increase the University of Oldenburg’s international profile as an attractive employer, in future the university should strategically participate in relevant networks (e.g. GAIN).

It should also aim to increase the number of international fellows (e.g. Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellowship, Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship, Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg Fellowships). This could, among other things, strengthen the international network of individual Schools, but also of the university as a whole. The university should also provide targeted support to promote the mobility of postdoctoral researchers abroad.

At the end of 2020, the International Office, which advises local researchers regarding opportunities abroad and helps international researchers with the planning of and during their stay at the University of Oldenburg, set up a guest portal (<https://uol.de/gaesteportal>). Here, international guest researchers can sign up to benefit from all the available services, information and opportunities. In addition to extensive information on all aspects of staying in Oldenburg in general and at the university in particular, monthly exchanges are organised, among other things. Information about the International Office’s Welcome Programme should be actively distributed within and outside the university.

f) Equal opportunities

There continues to be a lack of gender balance at all career levels, although there has been some improvement in recent years. Female researchers are still significantly underrepresented, especially in leading tenured professorships (W3). (See BuWiN 2021.) In order to achieve a more equal gender balance, the university will need to continue to review the appointment process and develop family-friendly conditions. (See also the DFG’s “Principles of Effective Career Support in Academia”, Nos. 3 and 10.)

As a certified “family-friendly university”, the University of Oldenburg has already set up numerous support and funding schemes for researchers who have caregiving responsibilities. The Graduate Academy also offers special programmes and opportunities for junior female researchers who have opted for the professorship career path, which are designed to empower them as individuals (mentoring, workshops on communication in a male-dominated academic environment, etc.).

g) Diversity

The University of Oldenburg is currently undergoing the Stifterverband's “Shaping Diversity” auditing process. One of the components is the consolidation and further development of services and activities for supporting young researchers, paying greater attention to diversity factors. For this reason, project 1, “Promotion of Early-career researchers”, was set up within the “Promotion of Early-career researchers and Research” project group. Its mission is to identify critical factors for the transitions between career phases, to ensure successful phase transitions along the career path while taking diversity factors

into account, to clarify existing and required data and to develop and implement further target-group-specific services and activities for the promotion of early-career researchers. The project is being coordinated by representatives from the Department for Research and Transfer, who will call on representatives from various status groups from the Schools and other organisational units, as well as external experts if necessary.

Appendix: Structures and measures for the training and support of postdoctoral researchers

(Last revised: June 2021)

a) Department for Research and Transfer / Research funding

- Individual guidance on the acquisition of third-party funding from various research funding institutions at the state, federal and European level, also on mobility.
- Research programme budget:
Researchers can submit applications for start-up funding for junior research groups and for funding to secure one's own position from the Presidential Board's research programme budget (a guide is available on the website).
- Upon request, and with the participation of VP-F, internal departmental coaching for proposal presentations to funding bodies; for applications to lead to a junior research group (e.g. ERC, Emmy Noether Groups (ENG), BMBF, VW Freigeist Fellowships), additional financing for a consultation provided by a media agency for the preparation of presentation materials.
- Twice-yearly round tables for junior professors and junior research group leaders with VP-F and VP-N.
- Information events as part of the Graduate Academy on funding opportunities for early-career researchers

b) Graduate Academy

- Individual workshops on career planning and development (both within and outside academia), leadership and management, communication and presentations (in German and English).
- An annual event on the rights and duties of junior professors and junior research group leaders with speakers from the DHV.
- Peer coaching programmes "Führen und Betreuen" (German) and "Making a Career after the Postdoc" (English), both lasting six months and comprising six modules, including individual coaching sessions.
- Measures to improve the compatibility of career and family for postdoctoral researchers in temporary positions: Individual coaching shortly before and up to a few months after the birth or adoption of a child and funding for the temporary appointment of an assistant when family circumstances are particularly taxing (under the departmental responsibility of VP-N, financed from strategy funds of the Federal Government-Länder Programme to support early-career researchers ("Nachwuchspakt")).
- Specifically for female researchers:
 - o Individual workshops on self-assertion strategies in the male-dominated academic environment
 - o Helene Lange Mentoring Programme for Female Researchers: "Progressio. Successful development in academic leadership", for female researchers on the way to a professorship, and "Potentials. Career orientation and planning for female researchers", for female doctoral candidates in the qualifying phase and junior postdoctoral researchers, each lasting 12 months with a supporting programme for further qualification.
To reflect our aspirations regarding diversity, both programmes also explicitly address inter-, trans- and non-binary persons who identify as female. Female researchers with disabilities or chronic illnesses are also explicitly invited to apply. In the "Potentials" programme, preference will also be given to women who were the first in their family to complete a university degree.

c) Innovative Hochschule Jade-Oldenburg! (IHJO!)

- Mentoring programme “Networking in practice! – New impulses from specialists and managers” (for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers – Focus: non-university career paths).
- Coaching for the development of interdisciplinary and labour market-relevant competences.
- Series of events with role models to present different career opportunities for academics.

d) Division 1, Professional Development/Organisational Development (PEOE)

- “Academic Leadership” programme for tenure-track professors, first-time appointees and tenured professors with workshops and individual coaching opportunities.

e) Schools

The Schools support their postdoctoral researchers in qualifying for further career steps in line with the position paper entitled “Framework conditions of the University of Oldenburg for early-career researchers”.

Superiors/supervisors and, if necessary, other suitable persons act as mentors in the phase after the doctorate. Regular, systematic feedback meetings are intended to provide the early-career researchers with a realistic assessment of their career opportunities in academia.

In principle, when assigning tasks to these individuals, they should make sure that they continue to have sufficient space for intensive independent research activities and their further establishment in the academic community. It should also be ensured that the early-career researchers have access to adequate resources (e.g. laboratory facilities, large-scale equipment, doctoral candidates, equipment/materials).

f) Personnel structural plan / Tenure-track professors

The establishment of tenure-track professorships at the University of Oldenburg promotes transparency and the timely planning of career paths for highly qualified researchers. In the second round of the Federal Government-Länder Programme to support early-career researchers, the University of Oldenburg acquired ten tenure-track professorships in 2019. The aim is to fill 25% of the vacant professorships with W1 professors on a tenure track by 2034.

In order to provide tenure-track professors with the best possible support on their path to becoming tenured professors, each of them may choose a personal mentor – if necessary, with the support of the School – who will guide them in all aspects of career planning and development throughout the entire probationary period. In particular, these individuals are on hand to provide advice during the critical phases of the interim and tenure evaluations.

The strategy funds linked to each filled professorship resulting from the programme are used for measures:

- to improve the compatibility of career and family
- to provide support in the event of a negative interim or tenure evaluation (coaching for further career planning)
- to support researchers who are on the path to professorship outside the programme

The University of Oldenburg’s structural plans also include career options for W1 professors without a tenure track and junior research group leaders who are already on the path to professorship. Like the

new tenure-track professorships, they will continue to benefit from the university's successful, close-knit support system, where they will receive individual guidance and support.

At the University of Oldenburg, personnel structural plans and personnel development are always regarded as mutually interrelated factors.

The following chart illustrates the structures and opportunities that are currently offered at the university to support early-career researchers as a whole.

SUPPORT AND QUALIFICATION FOR ACADEMICS

